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Date: March 18, 2008

Route To:

Subject: Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) Case Files and Process at Albuquerque Service Center (ASC), RSA letter

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

The centralization of the OWCP function at the ASC for all units has been completed. Most of the processes are the same but at a different location. We want to update you on the process now in place for all work related injury/illness claims.

The ASC/HCM/Workers' Compensation Section (WC) is now the initial point of contact for processing and managing all work related injury/illness claims. This includes all Forest Service employees, whether injured doing project work or on an incident. No other personnel or sub-units in the agency should be providing these services, which include maintaining compensation files, contacting OWCP, authorizing medical care using either the CA-16 or FS-6100-16, or counseling of employees.

In conjunction with the Interagency Fire Business organization, WC has updated the workers' compensation direction in the Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH) for treatment of injured workers while at the site of an incident. This includes granting certain incident personnel limited authority to authorize medical care. Once the employee leaves the incident site, WC will deal with all OWCP issues.

You should expect to see a significant increase in emphasis on supervisors completing their portion of the CA-1 or CA-2 and ensuring WC receives them within two days of receipt from the employee. Any delays by the supervisor relate directly to poor service for our injured employees in getting their claims adjudicated by OWCP. In the last year, the WC Section has increased their timeliness of claims submitted to OWCP from 30% to 38%. This is the highest level ever for our agency and is indicative that we are on the right track for this processing function. When we get our timeliness over 80%, we can start to feel good about our service to injured workers.

You can also expect frequent calls from WC specialists regarding returning current and former employees to work. The Forest Service has many cases where injured employees are able to perform productive work and it makes little sense to pay compensation when we have so much work they could be performing. Please start planning on the jobs you can make available to accommodate these efforts and play an active role in managing the agency's workers' compensation costs.

As you are aware, correspondence from OWCP to our agency is continuing to be sent to incorrect agency addresses. The problem is with OWCP's data base and we are working to fix it.



Please be patient and continue forwarding all mail, unopened, to the WC Section at the address listed below.

The initial process of filing a claim has not changed:

- Each employee that sustains a work-related injury and wants to file a workers' compensation claim reports the incident to their supervisor and files their claim through the Safety and Health Information Portal System (SHIPS), accessed through Dashboard. If they are unable to access SHIPS, the employee should file a hard copy without delay and later return to enter the information into SHIPS. If the employee has questions, they can contact their supervisor and/or call WC Section at 877-372-7248, press "2" for HCM, then press "5" for WC.
- The Supervisor completes their portion of the claim form (CA-1/CA-2) in SHIPS, or hard copy, if necessary. They may fax the form to the WC Section at 505-563-9981, or mail it overnight via Fed Ex to the address listed below. If forms are faxed, mail the original form to the address below using regular mail. This needs to be completed within **two (2) days** of the employee filing the claim.

USDA Forest Service
Human Capital Management
Mail Stop 118-WC
3900 Masthead St., NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109

- The WC Section will review, and finalize the forms and submit them to OWCP, within the required ten (10) working days.

How is medical care authorized?

- Who should I call for authorization? The injured employee, supervisor, or other responsible party can call the Contact Center at 877-372-7248, press "2" for HCM, then press "5" for WC. Advise the Contact Center representative this is a request for authorizing medical treatment and you need to speak with someone in the WC. Your call will be transferred directly to the WC Section after providing information needed by the Contact Center.
- What if the injury occurs on a weekend or after hours and no one is available at the WC unit to authorize the medical care? The WC Section will soon be providing 24 hours/7 days a week coverage for emergency use. Calls during the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. MDT should be made through the Contact Center. This will be available March 20, 2008, and the phone number is 505-280-7691.

What if I can't get hold of anyone, even with the 24 hour number? That is not a problem. Remember, the injured worker can get medical care from their chosen physician and the WC Section can contact the provider with authorization when they return to the office.

- This is a very common situation throughout the federal government in all agencies covered by this program. The employee can always go to the hospital emergency room and they are required to provide treatment even without an advance guarantee of payment. If you have questions, give WC a call.
- Where should I call for advice and assistance? For assistance, employees and/or supervisors should call the Contact Center at 877-372-7248, press "2" for HCM, then press "5" for WC. Once an employee requests assistance through the ASC/HCM Contact Center, the WC Assistant or Specialist will provide their direct contact number to the injured employee. We encourage any and all questions from both employees and supervisors.
- Where can I find more information? Complete instructions regarding the claims process can be found on the ASC/HCM/WC web site: <http://fsweb.hcm.fs.fed.us/owcp/all.php>. This site will be updated soon and continues to be updated as changes occur.

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